

What the law says...

UN Convention on Rights of the Child

Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Article 9

3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

Article 10

2. A child whose parents reside in different States shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis, save in exceptional circumstances personal relations and direct contacts with both parents.) - not of relevance here, but interesting.

Article 18

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

The Gender Equality Duty 2007: 1.20

Men are also disadvantaged by workplace cultures that do not support their family or childcare responsibilities, by family services that assume they have little or no role in parenting, or by health services which do not recognise their different needs. Both sexes suffer from stereotyping of their roles and needs. The duty should help the public sector, and those working with it, to identify and respond to stereotyping, sex discrimination and sexism, resulting in improvements for all.

The guidance quotes specific areas where improvement for fathers could indicate progress:

- Fathers receive greater support for their childcare responsibilities from public services and employers.

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Department for Education and Skills; Every Parent Matters 2007; 6.18

Promoting contact between children and their separated parents

Each year between 150,000 and 200,000 couples separate and many of these separations involve children. Where there is separation or divorce we want children to be able to continue to have meaningful and safe contact with both parents. A minority of separating couples (approx 10%) are unable to come to contact/residence arrangements amicably in the best interests of their children and turn to the family courts for help. Approximately 67,000 contact orders were made in England and Wales in 2004-05.

Department for Education and Skills; Every Parent Matters 2007; 7.1

Developing Parental Engagement

We have strong evidence of the beneficial impact of both good parenting and parental engagement in public services on children's outcomes. Public services in a range of areas need to improve how they work with parents.

Engaging parents effectively means:

- engaging both fathers and mothers;
- enabling parents to access information so that they can exercise effective choice;
- giving parents the means to influence the shape of services so that they meet their family's needs;
- practitioners providing services to the family seeking to work in equal partnership with parents to maximise the benefits to the children of the services received;
- enabling parents to find and draw down additional information and help to deal with specific issues when they need it; and
- ensuring opportunities for fathers and mothers to work in partnership with schools, taking account of the constraints on working parents.

Department for Education and Skills: Every Child Matters 2003; 3.1

Why parenting matters;

The bond between the child and their parents is the most critical influence on a child's life. Parenting has a strong impact on a child's life. Parenting has a strong impact on a child's education development, behaviour, and mental health.

Department for Education and Skills: Every Child Matters 2003 3.3

- Support programmes for fathers as well as mothers so that all children but especially those who are living apart from their fathers, develop positive relationships with both parents
- ensuring better communication between parents and schools to help support children to learn. We need to look at opportunities for families, and especially fathers, to become more closely involved in school life through parents' associations, as school governors, and as a result of home-school contracts.